

# City of Blue Ridge

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480 West First Street • Blue Ridge, Georgia • (706) 632-2091

## Downtown Development Authority Meeting

Special Called for Council

March 1, 2021

5:30 p.m.

480 West First Street

### Present:

Mayor: Donna Whitener

Council members: Rhonda Haight, Mike Panter, Robbie Cornelius

Zoning, Land Development, and Project Manager: Jeff Stewart

City Clerk: Kelly Crowder

Assistant City Clerk: Chris Mortimer

DDA Director: Cesar Martinez

DDA members: Jay Hamilton, Nichole Potzauf, Nathan Fitts, and Russell Black

### 1. Call Meeting to Order

Cesar Martinez called the meeting to order for the DDA

Mayor Donna Whitener called the meeting to order for the City Council.

### 2. Approve minutes from previous meeting

DDA member Jay Hamilton made a motion to table the minutes until the next meeting.

DDA member Nichole Potzauf seconded the motion.

Motion passed 4-0

Jay (M ) Nathan (X) Nichole ( S ) Russell ( X )

### 3. Chairman's Update

DDA Director Cesar Martinez wanted to first welcome newest member Russell Black, who will be the Director of Economic Development

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a. Welcome City Council members

Cesar Martinez welcomed the Council Members. He stated that based on the By-Laws there is an obligation to have an annual meeting between the DDA and the City Council.

b. By- Laws review

Cesar Martinez sent all the Council members the By-Laws and they were given a hard copy in the meeting. He asked if there were any questions about that. No questions. He wanted to make sure that everyone understood because in the last year there had been some questions about what authority the DDA had. He pointed out that nothing the DDA does is binding to the City.

c. DDA/City relationship

Cesar Martinez wanted to address how he sees the relationship working. Since it is a new working relationship, he wanted to ask that when working on things such as signage, parking, economic development, etc. that the Council keep the DDA in mind to include them in those conversations. That we shouldn't have two separate organizations going after the same thing. DDA member Nathan Fitts made a comment that communication has been one of the frustrations and reasons that they have lost members. He has expressed to Council to let the DDA do their job. Mr. Martinez wanted to make sure that going forward they think of each other to work together.

4. Treasurer's report

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Treasurer Jay Hamilton reported that they were basically going off what was reported last month since they are still waiting on some numbers. The total Revenue (hotel/motel and Parking) \$147,889.18. There have been two expenditures from Johnson's Paving. Paving and striping the parking lot behind the Co-op \$29,993.75. Leaving the ending balance \$117,895.43 That is net revenue.

## 5. Committee Chair and general committee updates

### a. Nichole – Design

DDA member Nichole Potzauf first described some of the goals for the design committee, including enhancing the overall atmosphere, physical shape, safety, and overall design. The goals for 2021 are to Develop DDA Design Committee guidelines in a tool kit to encourage property design maintenance and improvements. Also, to maintain a current inventory of businesses and properties within the designated business district. The goal is to complete phase 1 of Way Finding and Phase 2. Phase 1 is the immediate parking Way Finding signage. Currently there is also no clear signage of addresses on the businesses, this is a goal with uniformity as well.

More discussion with the Mayor and Council member Mike Panter about the historic information. The use of plaques to tell the history and different places that do this and what that looks like.

### b. Cesar – Parking

Cesar Martinez explained that the parking issues are evolving just very slowly. There is currently no director for parking. Parking is one of the biggest issues the City is facing. He mentioned that one of the biggest things that the DDA has accomplished is working with DDA member Nichole's committee making sure that the signs are going to



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be there to show visitors the best way to go and park. The next thing that has been really good is the paving and striping of the City's parking down by True Fitness. It has been a good income source. Also, there is new parking spaces that have come up. The new garage should be finished in the Spring, that will be almost 200 parking spaces. Council member Mike Panter asked who is this the biggest issue for? Is it the 1200 residents or the business owners or the tourists? Mr. Martinez stated that it is important to all of them, and neither is more important than the other. Mr. Panter didn't think the city should be spending 100% of its time just on parking or the revenue. Council member Nathan Fitts stated that parking is sustained by its own revenue. Council member Rhonda Haight wanted to point out that parking was generating between \$16,000 and 20,000/month, and if the city takes over Executive Parking, they are making about \$50,000 - \$60,000/year, that is another additional amount of money that can go towards our parking. Mr. Panter pointed out that a lot of the business owners were parking in front of their businesses as well. Mrs. Haight went on to say that is why they wanted to find alternative areas where they could park, so now that the city has identified those areas, now it is up to us as a Council and DDA to pursue those and then the city can transition. Mr. Martinez stated that at a previous Town Hall meeting they had addressed almost all of the concerns. Council member Mike Panter and Mr. Martinez discussed the need for store owners and employees to have a designated place to park to leave spots open downtown. Mr. Martinez explained that there needed to be motivation for them to do that and the biggest motivator would be the paid parking downtown. An attendee from the public discussed things he had seen in other places as ideas. One of the things mentioned was the issue with the parking for the train. Council member Nathan Fitts said that the train listed a parking lot they can use for parking. He stated that it was the Mayor's old parking lot that is the preferred parking

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spot, then there were several talking at once and Cesar Martinez asked that we not do that. Cesar Martinez called upon another person in the audience to speak who wanted to ask a question, former City Council member Angie Arp wanted to ask what the problem was since this has been a discussion for years now, she stated that before she left Council that \$1500/month could have leased the Pack Property that would have easily been paid for. So her question is what is the problem? Mr. Martinez noted that when Angie had proposed parking meters back when she was on the board that he opposed it because at the time there was no alternative for the store owners and their employees to park. Different ideas from audience were mentioned about purchasing lots to use for parking and there is proof that the City could sustain that and still have proceeds after making the payment. Mayor Whitener spoke about the need for proper signage. She stated that was an issue that people did not know where to park. She also asked Mr. Martinez if the church was still going to allow business owners and employees to park there. Mr. Martinez said he has not had a chance to talk to them and find out. Both Ms. Whitener and Mr. Martinez discussed other parking lots that would be available for business owners and employees.

c. Economic Development

Cesar Martinez stated that they were excited to have Russell Black as the director now. He thinks he will be a great addition to this committee with all of his experience. This committee will look at different things to bring new businesses downtown, or how to make empty buildings more productive, also working with GA Cities foundation to provide low interest loans to businesses who qualify.

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d. Community Outreach

Cesar Martinez spoke about the need for a Director of Community Outreach, someone who will work with the City and communicate it to the public. Also, that person would work with the organizations and know what was going on with the festivals and other events and communicate that as well.

e. City web site

This item was already taken care of. There was no information under the DDA tab. It is done.

6. General Public comment

General conversation about possible ideas related to parking.

Former Council member Angie Arp wanted to ask and be clear that projects the DDA are working on, such as parking, are not taken from taxpayers money. Cesar Martinez assured that no it was not. It is taken from the revenue generated from parking.

7. Executive session (if needed)

No session needed.

8. Adjournment

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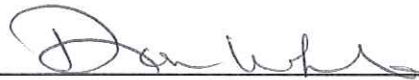
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For the City Council: Council member Rhonda Haight made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Council member Mike Panter seconded the motion.

(Council member Robbie Cornelius had to leave prior to adjourn)

Motion passed.



Mayor, Donna Whitener

May 11, 2021  
Approved



City Clerk, Kelly Crowder